

David Rosenthal  
Physician  
Yale School of Medicine

***Written Testimony for the Comm. on Veterans' Affairs,  
Conn. Gen. Assembly, on SB918***

Senator Cabrera, Representative Boyd, Senator Maroney, Representative Napoli, and distinguished members of the Committee on Veterans' Affairs, my name is David Rosenthal, I'm a Primary Care Physician, on faculty at Yale School of Medicine, now Chief Medical Officer of Tesseract Health and Liminal Sciences, and for the past 8.5 years I served as the Medical Director of the Homeless Patient Aligned Care Team for VA Connecticut – as I'm no longer a federal employee, I am adding my written testimony as a private citizen.

I submit this written testimony in support of Proposed Senate Bill 918, which will expand the definition of veteran in Connecticut to include those veterans whom the Department of Veterans Affairs ("VA") has recognized as "honorable for VA purposes". This bill is simple and clear. It is fair and just. Passing this bill into law is the right thing to do.

I have cared for many veterans over the past decade, many of whom difficult childhoods, such as adverse childhood experiences (such as trauma, neglect, difficulties with school, or substance use) and for whom, the US Military provided an opportunity to serve and a career path. For many, this is easy and are able to achieve an honorable discharge. However, many veterans serve in the U.S. Military only to be separated with a less-than-honorable discharge status because of behavior that actually resulted from unaddressed trauma, mental illness, or the effects of racism or discrimination. Often, even minor misconduct can lead to separation from service with an other-than-honorable ("OTH") discharge, which is a profound social stigma that carries with it the forfeiture of significant earned federal and state benefits. The result is that many of our state's most vulnerable veterans, those who need and deserve care and support,

often many who experience subsequent homelessness, are shut out of the benefit systems designed to support them.

In recognition that sometimes a veteran may have served honorably, faithfully, and meritoriously, despite very limited misconduct, the VA has a built-in system for deciding when OTH veterans should actually be considered “honorable for VA purposes” and allowed access to federal veteran’s benefits. The state of Connecticut does not have a similar system for determining which veterans may, in fact, have served honorably despite their discharge status. Currently, the state of Connecticut often denies benefits to veterans even if they are deemed honorable for VA purposes in the federal system. SB 918 would remedy that. With this proposed law, Connecticut would grant access to state benefits for those veterans who have proved they are honorable under federal law.

By passing SB 918, Connecticut would make its state veterans benefit system more just and inclusive. This expansion would reflect an ethic of fundamental fairness: if a veteran with a OTH discharge has succeeded in proving to the VA that their service was honorable despite their discharge status, then Connecticut should recognize that status as well. This change would also be simple and efficient to enact. It would require no adjudication by the state benefit system, and would merely recognize the merit of the VA’s existing, extensive adjudication process.

For all these reasons, I support SB 918 and I urge this legislature pass this bill into law. By expanding our state’s definition of who counts as a “veteran” to include those veterans recognized as honorable by the VA, we can create a more just and inclusive state benefit system.